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ABSTRACT

Factors to consider in assuring security for student events on campus are discussed, based on the experience of the University of South Florida, which has developed, tested, and critiqued a system of planning security. Even though special events vary significantly in type and purpose, some questions should be answered in advance, with the participation of student groups, promoters, and student advisers. These concerns are: the purpose of the event; who will attend; crowd size; advertising for the event; start/end time; the site; the admission fee; crowd control provisions; rules, regulations, and local and state laws; the performer's record at other campuses; traffic and parking; and whether a report will be done on the event. While regular crowds that attend athletic games are familiar with the campus setting, rules, and accommodations, persons visiting the campus for the first time may be unfamiliar with them and need special attention or assistance. It must be decided in advance whether marshals are to intervene in a crowd disturbance or should summon police/security. It is recommended that university safety officials be involved in pre-event meetings, since securing planning for special events will provide the basis for a legal defense in case of a tragedy. (SW)

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Planning for effective security at campus special events

Max L. Bromley

"A problem frequently encountered at many colleges and universities is the failure of persons in charge of various events to notify the security department far enough in advance so proper plans can be made." (Powell, p. 193).

The situation described above need not be the case if all parties involved in the planning of student events are communicating effectively and working toward a common end. The goal of any student event should be to provide a positive experience for everyone involved.

Given the frequency of civil litigation against universities, colleges, and individuals, it is now necessary to plan systematically for security at special events whether they are concerts, lectures by public figures, sports contests, or fraternity and sorority parties. Student programmers, student affairs advisers, outside promoters, and the college/university public safety department (called university police or campus security at some places) must develop operating procedures and agree on a common philosophy of security for events.

The University of South Florida experience

The University of South Florida is located on 1,700 acres north of Tampa, an ever-expanding metropolitan community. More than 25,000 students, faculty, and staff constitute the core of the campus community. In 1982, 90 special events on the campus required the presence of the University Police. This figure does not include NCAA sporting events. That year the campus police provided security at concerts by Chicago, Oak Ridge Boys, and Jimmy Buffet; a Bjorn Borg professional tennis match; a Gordon Liddy lecture; the Bob Barker Show; State Special Olympics; University graduation; and various fraternity parties. The Sun Dome, the major multipurpose facility on campus, had more than 220,000 patrons last year. Given the magnitude and frequency of special events being held on our campus, we have had ample opportunity to develop, test, and critique a system of planning for security. Special events may vary significantly in type and purpose, but certain fundamental issues must be resolved regardless of the event. Some questions we have found useful to have answered in advance, with the participation of student groups, promoters and student advisers are listed below.

Factors to consider

Purpose. The first and most basic question to ask is: "For what purpose is the event being held?" Is it to be a moneymaker or a charity event? Will the event be free for the university community with a fee charged to "outsiders," or will there be some other fee structure? The answers can vary considerably depending on the stated purpose of the event.

Attendees. Who will attend the event? Will the population be primarily university students, nonstudents, adolescents, juveniles, or persons beyond the traditional college age? To have bigger gates, many campuses schedule events that appeal to a wide variety of university and nonuniversity personnel. The "regular" crowds which attend football and basketball games are familiar with the campus setting, rules, and accommodations, but persons visiting the campus for the first time may be totally unfamiliar with them and need special attention or assistance.

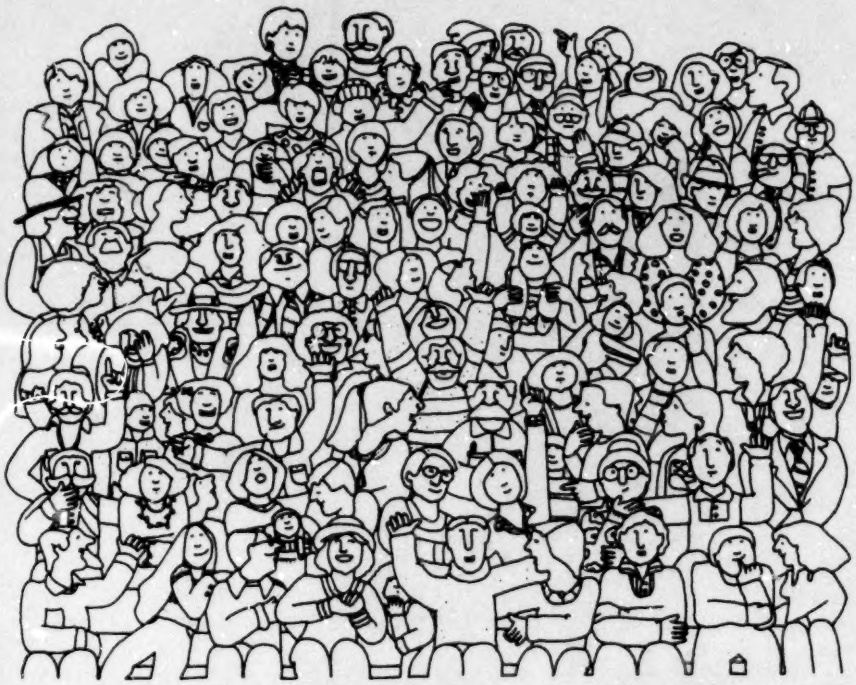
Crowd size. What is the anticipated size of the crowd? The importance of estimating crowd size and the expected student/nonstudent ratio cannot be overemphasized. The success of any event depends on providing reasonable answers to these questions in advance!

Advertising. How much advance advertising has there been for the event? Are posters and the student newspaper the only media being used? What do the ads say? If, for example, free beer is advertised for an outdoor concert on a spring day, you should know what to anticipate. Are the local popular radio stations advertising the event? Remember, if the ads on the radio do not specify university members only, your campus may well become a temporary haven for adolescents and juveniles. If that is the intent, fine; but be ready for it.

Start/end times. When is the event supposed to start and end? If it is a student organization-sponsored dance, will a representative of Student Affairs be available to ensure the time schedules are followed? This can be extremely important in maintaining good rapport with the surrounding community. Likewise, nothing makes a crowd more disenchanted or potentially unruly than for a musical group or guest lecturer to start late! Don't leave long lines waiting outside an arena, auditorium, or sports facility. Open the doors as soon as possible.

Site. Where is the event to be held? The program site is very important for planning purposes. A sports stadium, concert hall, gym, auditorium or lakefront all have different security needs. For an outdoor event, has an alternative site been established in the event of bad weather? What will be the physical configurations (seating, stage, etc.) of the event site? Has the university/college safety officer been consulted to ensure compliance with the various safety and fire codes?

Gate receipts. What is the admission fee? How many advance and gate



tickets will be put on sale? Are the tickets prenumbered and not easily duplicated? Who will the receipt-takers be—students or full-time staff? How many receipt-takers will be used? How long will the gates be open? Have provisions been made to have the cash picked up periodically and safely deposited?

Crowd control. What crowd control provisions have been established? Will ushers or marshals be used in addition to university police/security? How will the marshals be identified—T-shirts, caps, armbands, etc.? How many marshals will there be? Will the marshals be responsible strictly for maintaining order or will they also be ticket-takers, refreshment salespersons, etc.? What specific instructions have they been given about gate-crashers, medical problems, theft, armed robbery, and fire or bomb threats? Well-trained student marshals who can communicate effectively with both the crowd and the police/security officials are essential to good programming.

Rules. What about rules, regulations, and local and state laws? Have provisions been made to ensure that those who attend the event are aware of various rules of conduct? For example, if alcohol is not allowed inside the facility, are signs conspicuously posted outside the facility and are tickets stamped or printed with this prohibition? Is it clear what actions will be taken against those persons who violate the rules or regulations? Have the marshals been instructed not to physically intervene in any crowd disturbances, but rather to summon police/security? Has a clearly stated inspection policy relating to carry-in items such as knapsacks been posted? While these issues may vary from event to event, it is critical that student program sponsors and university public safety officials reach agreement on such matters before admitting patrons into the facility.

Prior Experience. What is the nature of the person or group performing? What is the performer's "track record" at other campuses? Can you reasonably anticipate certain kinds of crowd behavior? Does the performer have the reputation for encouraging or actually using drugs or alcohol during events? Will the performer be paid in cash or by check? When will the payment be made? Will the person or group need personal or equipment security? Talk to colleagues who have hosted the person or group. Don't let yourself be surprised.

Traffic and parking. Have adequate provisions been made for vehicular traffic into and out of the parking lots as well as the actual parking during the event? Who will be responsible for monitoring vehicles entering and leaving the parking area as well as for assisting in parking? Will the parking area be well lighted and patrolled to deter theft and vandalism? Have clear paths been established for emergency vehicles to enter and leave? Have other appropriate agencies such as the ambulance service and highway patrol been alerted?

Post-event. Will an After-Action Report be completed highlighting the good and bad points experienced at the event? If such a report is done, will recommendations be made to improve future events? Will the parties who planned the event (students, student affairs, promoters, and public safety officials) meet to discuss the event and the After-Action Report?

Conclusion

No two special events are the same. Each has its own peculiar twists which go beyond any pre-established formula for programming success. Security at special events is not solely the responsibility of the campus public safety department. Involve the university safety officials in your pre-event meetings; be critical in your planning; evaluate, and re-evaluate your final plan. Take nothing for granted; to do so can be very costy and painful for all. At the very least, a systematic approach to security planning for special events will provide the basis for a legal defense in the event of a tragedy.

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